

Meet Audrey Larson

*O*N a November morning in New England, I stand in the slightly cluttered, movie poster clad bedroom of Audrey Larson, 17, who sits in a director's chair, stroking a purring tabby. I notice a stack of Hollywood Reporters (her "morning ritual"), a framed still from I Love Lucy (Audrey's "first comedic obsession"), a Smith-Corona typewriter, and an ornate rotary telephone. A self-prescribed "old soul", Audrey is an avid antique collector and history buff. "At 5 years-old, I entered my first antique store. Before long, I was bargaining with the shopkeeper for 1960's Fisher Price toys," she says. I lift up a pair of worn pointe shoes dangling from the bulging book shelf and Audrey indicates a small blood stain on the shoe's tip. She credits her 10 years of classical ballet training as a source of discipline and commitment. "You learn how to persevere. Even when you've physically given everything." This stamina is the driving force in her life as she struggles to balance her many interests, high school classes, acting auditions, film production, and community service. Perched alongside her prized antique finds, a family portrait catches my eye. Eagerly, Larson rattles off the names of her 15 cousins. Her expression softens as she recalls the many Passovers spent with extended family, the road trips, Bat Mitzvahs, and reunions. "My friends would complain about spending holidays with relatives, but for me, being with family was always the best part of life, the most distinctive." Larson leans back in the director's chair, contemplating. "There's something about those pure, spontaneous moments in time with family that captivates me. There's a certain freedom to be ourselves, a certain vulnerability that is exposed. I crave to explore those bonds in film."

Larson needn't look much further for a distinctive family. Her brother is a fencer and chess enthusiast, her mother, a published author. Audrey's grandfather was an Olympian, her grandmother, an actress and singer, and great-grandfather, a concert pianist. Her older sister Emily started Yaldah, a print magazine for Jewish girls, at only 13 years old. Audrey thumbs through the glossy pages of the magazine, recounting her experiences growing up with a teen entrepreneur who received national recognition. At age 8, Audrey was sealing envelopes and mailing magazines at the post office, "It really morphed into a family business," Larson, who worked as the magazine's customer service rep at age 13, says. Not infrequently, dinner conversations turned to marketing strategies or the magazine's finances. At age 10, Larson helped her sister campaign for Yaldah to win \$100,000 in the Wells Fargo Someday Stories contest. "It happened to be the 2008 presidential elections. I stood outside the polls with my mom, handing promo flyers to people, saying 'please vote for my sister!' and they kept telling me they'd already voted inside." Larson laughs, the memory fresh. When her sister won, the Wells Fargo horse-drawn stage coach showed up at the family's suburban home. "That was just normal life to me. I thought everyone's sister had her own magazine."

In the Larson household, it was a given that kids could do big things—a lesson that launched Audrey into co-founding a youth filmmaking organization at age 14. Larson never lets age become a barrier in achieving her goals. She regularly seeks out networking events, screenwriting workshops, acting auditions, film festival screenings, conferences, and lectures.

By Audrey Larson

“I’m usually the only teen in attendance. I’ll go and introduce myself to the speaker and hand him my business card.” Audrey believes that cultivating relationships is the key to success. “It’s not just about networking; it’s about connecting.” And connect she does. Audrey is an active member of the New England film community, sharing casting notices, and offering advice to stage parents. Audrey is comfortable interacting with people of all ages and backgrounds, which she attributes to her 11 years of homeschooling. Larson sees herself as an advocate for the burgeoning homeschooling movement, a byproduct of being subjected to misinformed questions like, “Do you have friends?” or “Do you watch TV all day?”. One of her goals is to better represent homeschoolers in movies and television. “There are massive misconceptions about homeschoolers. As a filmmaker, I hope to challenge those stereotypes as well as explore alternative movements like world-schooling and un-schooling. Branching out from the typical, default school experience portrayed on screen provides tremendous opportunity for fresh, original storytelling.”

Before departing, I ask about the significance of the large world map hanging above Larson’s desk. She tells me about her goal of someday traveling the world. But to Audrey, I discover, the map is more than a dream. “It keeps me focused on the big picture,” she says, gazing at the colored countries, “It reminds me of the billion other lives out there, each trying to achieve something, or maybe just survive.” She looks back at me, with a laugh, “I guess it puts my problems in perspective.” Perspective is what drew Larson to acting, creative writing, and film. There’s an intensity and excitement in Audrey’s blue eyes as she discusses the root of her film passion. “I’m kind of stuck with this body, this mind. That will never change. But in a movie, I can dive into someone else’s head; I can explore the world through their eyes. It’s really quite extraordinary.” ♦